

The importance of implementation at the 'ME' level



**Commentary
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A lot has been written about the implementation of the Integrated Safety Management System at various levels of Hanford projects, facilities and activities. But what about the most important level of all — the ME level. Yes, that's "me," as in you and me.

This is the level where the safety analyses and environmental assessments have been prepared, permits have been obtained, job hazard analysis has been completed, work instructions and procedures have been finalized and pre-job reviews have been conducted. The work is ready to begin.

Now it is up to me to enter the job location, and to stop and think for a moment of all that stuff that I have heard and read to this point and what it means right now. Remember those tripping hazards we noted in the job hazards analysis — where are they? Am I paying attention to avoid them? How about that item I have to lift — how heavy is it? Can I really lift it safely? Am I in a good ergonomic position to move it? Have I looked around enough to know there are no obstructions in the way? Should I really have some help?

This is the ME level. It is not defined in the ISMS policies, descriptions and guidance documents, but it's truly where the rubber meets the road. It is how we stay safe and go home healthy to our families each night. The ME level applies to all of us, no matter what our position or function, and we can incorporate it throughout our daily activities. The engineer can ask, "Have I really designed safety into my structure or process?" The work planner can ask, "Are the instructions and procedures complete and understandable?" The manager or supervisor can ask, "Have I provided clear direction and resources needed to safely perform the work?" The craft worker can ask, "Do I understand the job and the controls (personal protective equipment, for example) established to ensure it can be performed safely?"

ISMS — and VPP, too, for that matter — is something that we just do. It has been proven to work. We may not fully realize that we're doing it, because nobody is spouting acronyms and preaching guiding principles or core functions the whole time. But it is occurring at all levels. This is not to say that we can't do our work better and safer and continuously strive for improvement — we can.

Nearly every aspect of our jobs presents us with the opportunity to integrate considerations for environment, safety and health into the work we plan and do. Even something as simple as ME holding a handrail when going down a set of stairs is implementing ISMS and VPP.

ME is not an acronym. It's the most important personal pronoun in our safety programs. ■